

Goofy Guide Game: affordances and constraints for engagement and oral communication in English

Kaisa Enticknap-Seppänen¹

Abstract. This study investigates tourism undergraduates' perceptions of learning engagement and oral communication in English through their experiences of testing a pilot purpose-designed educational digital game. Reflecting the implementation of digitalization strategy in universities of applied sciences in Finland, it examines whether single instances of digital gameplay afford oral communication in the L2. Sociocultural and ecological language learning theories were the framework of the study. The data consist of the teacher researcher's observations of gameplay sessions, learning diaries and preliminary and post-gameplay online questionnaires. The learning diaries and open questionnaire responses were analyzed with qualitative content analysis using the preliminary questionnaire responses for comparison. The results showed that once-off gameplay sessions afforded engagement and oral communication in the L2. However, the questionnaire responses and learning diaries implied that the students had high expectations of learning engagement and oral skills development which were not completely fulfilled due to game design constraints. This suggests that although much occurs during single instances of gameplay, a participatory approach involving education professionals and learners in educational game design is warranted to fully optimize L2 appropriation within the game environment.

Keywords: digital educational game, engagement, learning, oral communication.

1. Introduction

In Finland, higher education has embraced digitalization by integrating computer assisted and web based learning into curriculum design. Within this context, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences enabled the '*Simppeli, Simulator and game*

1. Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, Kajaani, Finland; kaisa.enticknap-seppanen@kamk.fi

How to cite this article: Enticknap-Seppänen, K. (2017). Goofy Guide Game: affordances and constraints for engagement and oral communication in English. In K. Borthwick, L. Bradley & S. Thouèsny (Eds), *CALL in a climate of change: adapting to turbulent global conditions – short papers from EUROCALL 2017* (pp. 105-109). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.eurocall2017.697>

expertise application in teaching' project (Rantaharju, 2016). Simppeli allowed one language teacher researcher to design and pilot a digital educational game, with the assistance of game design experts. This interdisciplinary collaboration produced a digital educational game in the L2 (English) specifically for tourism students, which was piloted in an on-campus game laboratory.

The aim of this study was to examine whether a purpose-built educational digital game (Goofy Guide Game) afforded learner engagement and face-to-face oral communication in English among players during single instances of gameplay. The research is situated in a period of rapid change in language learning due to digitalization, which has also broadened the focus of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research from the formal classroom setting into informal spaces such as online gaming (Cornillie, Thorne, & Desmet, 2012).

2. Method

In autumn 2016, two groups of first year tourism students were split into eight teams of four to six persons and played the game two teams at a time, during four gameplay sessions. The game laboratory, equipped with computers, virtual reality hand and headsets, cameras, audio and lighting equipment, and screens and touch screen devices, offered an exciting non-classroom setting for piloting the game. The two teams were arranged in front of a large screen around two touch-screen devices.

The game consists of a 2D online audio-visual animation made with the widely available online animation software, Go Animate. It presents seven tourist guiding events where the guide behaves inappropriately in customer service situations. These include meeting the tourist group, explaining the itinerary, safety procedures, recommending places to eat, informing, describing monuments, and dealing with an emergency. Of each event, there are four alternative versions (A, B, C, and D) which the players had to slide into the order of best to worst from a customer service perspective, using the touch screen devices.

The players watched and listened to the animation, discussed the different versions in English and then had twenty seconds to agree, slide the answers into position and lock them. They also had to interpret tourism and customer service lexis and differentiate between the levels of politeness communicated by the game's guide character, including deictic cues such as non-verbal expressions. After locking answers, the game displayed the teams' scores on a leaderboard. Each gameplay

session took approximately forty minutes to complete. The teacher-researcher organized and observed the gameplay sessions. A video about the game is available at <https://youtu.be/idPmuJT2H3Y>.

The data were collected with (1) observation, (2) an anonymous pre- and post-game questionnaire created, shared, and gathered via Google forms, and (3) individual learning diaries returned to the Moodle learning management platform after the game sessions. The data were analyzed manually with qualitative content analysis. First the teacher researcher's observations, open responses to the pre- and post-game questionnaires were read, searching for themes, then the learning diaries. The themes that emerged: enjoyment, collaboration, deixis, physical environment, duration of gameplay, soundscape, humor, speaking English, listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, professional competence awareness and development, and learning engagement were combined and categorized under the higher order headings of game design, physical environment and interaction. The affordances and constraints for learning and speaking English that arose from the data were then investigated through these headings.

To frame the analysis, this case study employed the sociocultural and ecological approach (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2010) to language learning to interpret the social interactions of gameplay. It was a useful theoretical approach for considering English L2 use and appropriation among Finnish higher education students who, as young adults, are encouraged to be active and take responsibility for their own learning within a curriculum involving collaborative work and projects. Sociocultural and ecological learning places students at the center of an environment that provides learning opportunities both inside and outside the formal classroom setting. These affordances can be mediated through physical tools such as digital devices, in this case the game on the screen and the touch screens, and cultural tools such as language, here English L1 spoken by the guide and the tourists (L2) in the game, and the students themselves (L2). The affordances can be appropriated, in other words adopted, by the students through meaningful social activity, such as interaction during face-to-face gameplay.

3. Results and discussion

Within this theoretical framework, the appropriation of learning opportunities can occur through interactions between experts and novices, such as teachers and students, peers with more or less English language competence, and between technology and learners. According to the teacher researcher's observations, the

open answers to the post-game questionnaires and the content of the learning diaries; interactions occurred between the team members, and between the game technology, content and players, within the physical environment of the game laboratory.

The outcome of the analysis revealed a contradiction between the teacher researcher's observations and how the players construed learning and speaking English. During the brief once-off gameplay sessions, the students were seen to actively engage with the game content by watching, listening to and discussing issues relevant to deciding how to order their answers on the touch-screens. However, although the players reported that they spoke English, they mentioned a lack of oral utterances and oral communication development. Their explanation for this lack of development lay in the use of deictic communication strategies, such as focusing gaze at other team-mates, nodding and shaking their heads, or pointing, and using short interjections such as 'yes', 'no' or 'over here'. This situation was exacerbated by the limited time the game allowed for discussion, deciding and locking the answers, and by the size of the teams, which prevented some team members from fully participating in the discussions.

On the other hand, the players reported that they had acquired tourism lexis and an awareness of how not to behave in guiding situations. Others mentioned that their L2 listening comprehension improved, although using multiple senses simultaneously distracted from speaking. The players desired more time to discuss the answers, for gaps in the guide-tourist dialogues requiring correct fillers for the game to progress. They also found the gameplay and teamwork enjoyable and appreciated the humour inspired by the unprofessional guide. The learning diaries showed that the game provided a space to reflect on learner and emerging tourism professional identity. For instance, although prior familiarity with subject and linguistic content was mentioned, others felt they could apply it later in working life. Although mainly emphasizing multiplayer online role-playing games, previous research provides somewhat similar outcomes. They indicate that gaming possibly reduces emotional barriers to communication, involves motivating and collaborative features, and rich linguistic environments which benefit L2 learning and promote oral communication and engagement (Cornillie et al., 2012).

4. Conclusions

The players recalled the multiple actions occurring during gameplay and could reflect on its linguistic and professional benefits. However, their experiences of

language learning during the game did not match their expectations, which were reported in terms of separate skills, lexis and professional competence development. As above, although the players felt their confidence to speak, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and customer service competence improved, further scaffolding, such as integrated structured speaking tasks employing the lexis in the game, could provide a more positive learning experience. These results are relevant within the discourses of digitalization and game-based learning and can help educators to employ a participatory approach also involving students in game purchase decision-making and design for solutions covering a broad range of learner needs.

5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Simppeli project, KAMK's School of Information Systems, and students of the School of Tourism and Sports for this opportunity to create a digital education game with game design experts and to conduct this research and Ph.D. student Kirsi Korkealehto for her assistance with the research questionnaires and reporting the results.

References

- Cornillie, F., Thorne, S. L., Desmet, P. (2012). Digital games for language learning: challenges and opportunities, from hype to insight. *ReCALL*, 24(3), 243-256. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344012000134>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). Sociocultural theory and second language learning. In B. Van Patten & J. Williams (Ed.), *Theories in second language acquisition. An introduction* (2nd edition). Routledge.
- Rantaharju, T. (2016). PowerPoint presentation simppeli project (1.1.2015-31.12.2017). <https://www.kamk.fi/loader.aspx?id=205115d3-27c2-4aa5-8a48-530c844b5ae5>
- Van Lier, L. (2010). The ecology of language learning: practice to theory, theory to practice. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 3, 2-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.005>

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

© 2017 by Editors (collective work)
© 2017 by Authors (individual work)

CALL in a climate of change: adapting to turbulent global conditions – short papers from EUROCALL 2017
Edited by Kate Borthwick, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouësny

Rights: This volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; individual articles may have a different licence. Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.eurocall2017.9782490057047>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net

Cover design based on © Josef Brett's, Multimedia Developer, Digital Learning, <http://www.eurocall2017.uk/>, reproduced with kind permissions from the copyright holder.

Cover layout by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Photo "frog" on cover by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-04-7 (Ebook, PDF, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-05-4 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-03-0 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)

Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2017.